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SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL CHERNOBYL REHABILITATION PROGRAM:  
URGING USG PARTICIPATION

This is an action request. See para 5.

¶2. The International Program Cooperation for Rehabilitation (CORE) was established in 2002 following a UN report on the remaining consequences in Belarus of the Chernobyl disaster. According to UNDP officials who briefed DCM and poloff recently, the report signaled a shift in assistance priorities from emergency relief to long-term rehabilitation and development. The Declaration of CORE principles, which were signed by 27 international partners, including the majority of Western embassies and international organizations in Belarus (but not the USG), emphasizes the importance of sustainability, integrated approach and the involvement of local populations in assistance projects. The Chernobyl Children International, an offshoot of an Irish organization, which recently registered as a U.S. NGO, and the Mott foundation, are also signatories, according to the local UNDP reps.

¶3. The CORE program itself is a mechanism through which projects in the Chernobyl region initiated by local groups can be matched up with interested donors. UNDP as the coordinator and administrator compiles the projects, screens them and then makes them available for donors. Financing can then be channeled directly to the implementer or through UNDP. Technically, the program is still in a pilot phase and operates in only four districts of Belarus - Bragin, Chechersk, Stolin and Slavograd (Brest, Gomel and Mogilev oblasts) - but is expected to be expanded soon. In the first year of operation, 2004, 50-60 projects were supported; this year 42 projects have been identified in the first of two rounds. In addition to these small projects, the CORE framework includes larger, "topical" projects in the areas, of education, radiation information, health and agriculture. TACIS has committed two million Euros to fund topical projects, mainly in the health field.

¶4. CORE small projects, which focused on independent information and education on radiation levels, environment, youth and women's health, are not unlike those implemented by the US NGO Counterpart before it was de-registered by Belarusian authorities. The UNDP program officer, who earlier worked for Counterpart, noted that many of the local groups that Counterpart supported are now working with UNDP.

¶5. ACTION Request: Post urges Department to explore with UNDP the possibility of working with CORE. UNDP reps note that signing on to the CORE principles is not a funding commitment. CORE participation can leverage assistance dollars because UNDP pre-screens projects and performs other administrative services out of its own funds. Moreover,

project registration is facilitated because the program enjoys the support of the GOB and being under UNDP auspices, USG supported activities would not attract the attention of GOB authorities. CORE could offer a relatively easy avenue to expand USG involvement in Chernobyl rehabilitation, an area in which we have not been active.

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